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ABSTRACT

As part of the continuing search for the environmental antecedents of competence in young children, this study investigated several parameters of a population of disadvantaged Mexican-American children. The factors of child competence on which this study focused were behavioral adjustment and linguistic ability. The antecedents of competence were sought in family variables, specifically in overall family constellation, parental language patterns, child-rearing attitudes, parental self-concept, parental and other roles within the family, and various attitudinal concepts. The sample of disadvantaged Mexican-American children consisted of 134 5-year-old Head Start enrollees. After the subjects were rated on behavioral adjustment and language ability (by teacher ratings and language scores), 20 were selected for a High-Adjustment, High-Language (H-H) group and 20 others for a Low-Adjustment, Low-Language (L-L) group. Familial data were collected on 15 children in each group. Analysis of the child competence data reveals a moderate relationship between behavioral adjustment and linguistic ability. Analysis of familial data and the child competence data suggests more adequate family adjustment and more favorable "semantic structure" regarding school-related concepts in the H-H group. (MH)

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ON

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John Pierce-Jones, Ph.D., Director

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FAMILY FACTORS RELATED TO COMPETENCE IN YOUNG, DISADVANTAGED MEXICAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN

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Family Factors Related to Competence in Young, Disadvantaged Mexican-American Children[1]

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A number of investigators (Ausubel, 1964; Grey and Klaus, 1965; Hunt, 1967) have pointed out that environmental conditions of disadvantaged children fail to produce the social, motivational, and verbal skills necessary for adaptation to the dominant culture. Hunt (1967) has introduced the concept of Competence to describe these deficits in disadvantaged children and has pointed out that deficits in Competence seem especially detrimental to the child in his attempt to socially and cognitively adapt to the school environment.

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Though the general areas of social, emotional, and cognitive adaptation are receiving much attention with Negro populations, the authors know of no empirical investigations designed to study child Competence and its relationship to family factors in a disadvantaged, Mexican-American population. Since our clinical experience suggests that many low Competence Mexican-American children are immediately or eventually referred for mental health services, it was felt that an investigation of the relationship between child Competence and family styles of adaptation might provide useful clinical information.

Specifically, the present research has attempted to identify high and low Competence children within a population of disadvantaged, preschool, Mexican-American children and then to compare family factors related to Competence level in these children. Child Competence was determined upon the basis of behavioral adjustment and linguistic ability. The latter variable was considered particularly important, in light of its potential relationship to such things as the teacher's perception of the child and family language patterns. Also, the child's linguistic ability constitutes an obvious coping mechanism, perhaps leading to an easier school adaptation, if high, and a poorer school adaptation, if low.

Family variables studied included social data, regarding the over-all family constellation, parental language patterns, child-rearing attitudes, parental self-concept, parental and other roles within the family, and various attitudinal concepts, possibly related

to school adjustment and linguistic ability. Though it was anticipated that differences between families would occur on many of these variables, this phase of the study was essentially an empirical exploration. However, it was anticipated that the patterns in the high and low Competence families would be consistent with the picture of high or low behavioral adjustment and linguistic ability manifested by their children.

Method

Subjects

The total child sample consisted of 134 Mexican-American children living in a predominately lower socioeconomic, Mexican-American section of west San Antonio. All were five-year old, Head Start enrollees for the summer of 1968 and were located in ten separate classrooms within five separate schools of the San Antonio Independent School District. The total sample was screened for behavioral adjustment and language ability, and groups of 20 High-Adjustment, High-Language (H-H) and 20 Low-Adjustment, Low-Language (L-L) subjects were selected on the basis of teacher ratings and language scores. In the L-L group, it was possible to select children who were low in adjustment and low in both English and Spanish ability. However, in the H-H group, there were too few cases of children high in both languages, so that, for this group, about half of the S's were high in both languages, one-fourth high in English only, and one-fourth high in Spanish only. H-H and L-L groups contained an equal number of male and female S's.

It should be noted that choice of S's for each group was based on the selection of extremes within each classroom, rather than on high and low scoring within the total distribution of behavior and language scores. This was done to insure that each neighborhood would receive approximately equal representation in the H-H and L-L groups. Subsequent inspection indicated that the groups were also differentiated within the total score distribution of language adjustment scores, with H-H's being above the median in the total distributions and L-L's being below the median in the total distributions.

Due to unavailability, refusal to cooperate, or incomplete protocols, adequate data were obtained from only 12 mothers and 7 fathers in each group. However, these data were representative of 15 H-H and 15 L-L family units. All families studied were at or below the "Poverty Line" index, established by the Office of Economic Opportunity to determine eligibility for the Head Start Program. Additional social data, relative to H-H and L-L families, may be found in Table 2.

Measures

The classroom behavior inventory, preschool to primary (CBI).

This 60-item instrument, developed by Schaefer (1965), requires that teachers rate each child on a 4-point scale, ranging from "Very Much Like" to "Very Little Like." Half of these items tap six intermediate factors associated with adequate adjustment, including Verbal Expressiveness, Gregariousness, Kindness, Considerateness, Perseverance,

and Concentration. Half tap six intermediate factors associated with poor adjustment, including Social Withdrawal, Self-Consciousness, Irritability, Resentfulness, Hyperactivity, and Distractability. These intermediate factors are linked to six basic factors, including Introversion-Extroversion, Positive Social Behavior-Social Hostility, and Positive Task-Oriented Behavior-Negative Task-Oriented Behavior. The Subject's basic factor scores were obtained by first summating the intermediate factors and then subtracting summated poor adjustment factors from summated adequate adjustment factors (e.g., Verbal Expressiveness + Gregariousness - Social Withdrawal + Self-Consciousness = Introversion or Extroversion score).

For the purposes of this study, an over-all adjustment score was calculated. This was accomplished by summating the basic factor scores for each child, taking account of the algebraic sign. This positive or negative sum represented the measure of adjustment for each child.

Tests of basic language competence in English and Spanish, Level 1: Children ages 3-6 (TBLC). Language ability in English and Spanish was assessed by this test, developed by Cervenka (1968). This instrument consists of 9 English subtests and 9 parallel Spanish subtests, designed to measure basic linguistic ability in Spanish-speaking, bilingual children. For the purpose of this study, four subtests, including Oral Vocabulary, Comprehension of Commands and Directions, Recognition of Interrogative Patterns, and Phonemic

Discrimination at Word Level, were administered. These subtest scores were combined to give each child a total English and Spanish ability score.

Social data questionnaire. This questionnaire, consisting of 44 items, was administered to all H-H and L-L parents. It was assembled from a previous instrument employed by Cervenka (1967) and additional items formulated specifically for this study. Areas of information obtained included family size, educational level, urban or rural origin, birth order of children, family structure, language use in the home, educational aspiration for the child, and other data presumably associated with the child's adjustment within the school situation. Table 2 presents the major aspects of this instrument.

Semantic differential. The Semantic Differential technique (Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum, 1957), was employed with parents to measure the following three clusters of variables: (1) self-concept; (2) roles within the family; and (3) concepts related to the child's school adjustment. Specific concepts studied were the following: (1) I, Myself; (2) Mexican-American Father, Husband, Mother, Wife; (3) My Child in Head Start; (4) My Family; (5) Learning on the Job; (6) Learning in School; (7) "La Raza"; (8) How the Anglo Teacher Sees Mexican-American Children; (9) How the Mexican-American Teacher Sees Mexican-American Children; (10) The English Language; (11) The Spanish Language; and (12) Fate, As It Affects My Child's School Learning. All concepts were rated for the Evaluative (E), Activity (A), Potency (P), and Aggression (Ag) factors described by Osgood; however, specific items

for each concept varied in number and content. Each concept, presented randomly to control for order effect, was administered to all available H-H and L-L mothers and fathers, in either English or Spanish, depending on parental linguistic ability.

In order to compensate for varying linguistic ability in many parental S's, all Semantic Differential material was presented orally, using a specific technique designed to aid S's in the scaling process (Osgood and Jakobovits, 1967). In this procedure, the E first read the concept. Next, the E proceeded to the first item, stated each extreme, and then the neutral term (e.g., Mexican-American Wife - Good (Buena), Bad (Mala), or Neither Good Nor Bad (Asi-Asi). If one extreme were chosen, then the E aided the S in scaling the particular extreme choices (e.g., Very Good (Muy Buena), Good (Buena), or a Little Good (Poca Buena). For both the initial and the finer scaling process, polarities were constantly reversed, in order to control for position effects. Needless to say, this process proved a grueling one; however, pilot experience indicated that traditional presentation methods were out of the question with this population.

Parent-attitude rating survey. This instrument, as modified by Drews and Tehan (1957), was employed to assess child-rearing attitudes. This scale consists of three subscales designed to measure dominating, possessing, and ignoring attitudes in parents. It was administered to all available H-H and L-L parents.

Results and Discussion

With Children

In order to adjust for variations in the distribution of ratings between teachers, CBI rating scores were transformed into standard scores with a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10. These scores were used in analyzing correlations between teacher ratings and childrens' performance on the TBLC.

Table 1 presents product-moment correlations between CBI total scores, TBLC English total scores, and TBLC Spanish total scores for all subjects screened. As inspection indicates, there is a moderate, positive relationship (.41) between English ability and teacher rating, suggesting that perhaps those with more English ability are better prepared to meet the demands of the Head Start classroom, and therefore, manifest fewer signs of maladjustment. An alternative hypothesis, namely, that a teacher's adjustment rating is partially determined by the child's English ability, is also a possible interpretation. Unfortunately, present data do not permit a choice between these two interpretations; however, the low correlation between Spanish ability and teacher rating (.08) suggests that, in the total sample, Spanish language ability did little to determine teacher ratings.

Correlations between English and/or Spanish TBLC scores and teacher ratings were high for the extreme H-H and L-L groups (.86). As reported earlier, inspection of protocols indicates that the L-L

TABLE 1

Correlations Between CBI Total Scores, TBLC English Total Scores, and TBLC Spanish Total Scores

	English TBLC (W = 134)	Spanish TBLC (W = 124)	CBI (W = 134)
English TBLC		.24*	.41*
Spanish TBLC			.08*
CBI			

*p > .01

group was low in both English and Spanish ability, but that, in the H-H group, about half of the S's tended to be high in both languages, one-fourth high in English only, and one-fourth high in Spanish only. Thus, for the H-H group, general language ability (rather than English ability only, as found in the total sample) is associated with a higher adjustment rating. This finding may suggest that the children who are the most language competent bring more adequate coping mechanisms into the classroom, compensate quickly, and are rated by the teachers as well adjusted.

Test-retest correlations for H-H and L-L groups with the CBI yielded a Pearson rating of .88, indicating that children rated high or low in adjustment during the early phase of the Head Start Program continued this pattern. This finding suggests that mere exposure to Head Start did not improve adjustment patterns in the L-L group and provides tentative evidence that behavioral adjustment in both groups was not situational in nature.

Results and Discussion

With Families

Demographic Data

Table 2 presents a summary of the demographic data collected from families of H-H and L-L children. Inspection reveals that H-H and L-L families are relatively similar in most ways, with both appearing to be relatively nonmobile, urban-born, home owners or renters, who tend to secure prenatal care and have their children born in hospitals.

TABLE 2

Social Data for H-H and L-L Families

Family Data	H-H	L-L	z*	t*
Mean Birth Order Rank of Child	3.47	4.43	--	NS
Mean Number of Children in Family	5.07	6.29	--	NS
Percentage of Reported Prenatal Care and Hospital Delivery	86%	93%	NS	--
Percentage of Father Absence	33%	33%	NS	--
Percentage of Mother Absence	0%	7%	NS	--
Percentage of Families Reporting Two or More Marriages	47%	7%	.008	--
Mean Age of Fathers	34.7	39.9	--	NS
Mean Age of Mothers	32.3	31.1	--	NS
Mean Years Education of Fathers	7.28	5.86	--	NS
Mean Years Education of Mothers	8.93	6.13	--	.016
Percentage of Fathers Born in San Antonio	58%	58%	NS	--
Percentage of Fathers Born in Urban Setting	80%	84%	NS	--
Percentage of Mothers Born in San Antonio	66%	78%	NS	--
Percentage of Mothers Born in Urban Setting	83%	85%	NS	--
Percentage of Families Reporting Welfare as Primary Source of Income	7%	50%	.007	--
Percentage of Families Living in Public Housing	20%	21%	NS	--
Percentage of Families Reporting One or More Moves in Past 5 Years	7%	14%	NS	--

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Social Data for H-H and L-L Families

Language Data	H-H	L-L	z*	t*
Percentage of Families Reporting Spanish as First Language of the Child	66%	93%	.08	--
Percentage of Mothers Speaking Spanish Only to Child	27%	47%	NS	--
Percentage of Mothers Speaking Spanish and English to Child	60%	53%	NS	--
Percentage of Mothers Speaking English Only to Child	13%	0%	NS	--
Percentage of Fathers Speaking Spanish Only to Child	43%	55%	NS	--
Percentage of Fathers Speaking Spanish and English to Child	36%	45%	NS	--
Percentage of Fathers Speaking English Only to Child	21%	0%	.07	--
Percentage of Families Reporting Spanish as Main Language in Home	66%	93%	.08	--

*All z and t tests are two-tailed.

Of interest is the relatively high rate of father absence, due to separation, divorce, or abandonment, in both family constellations (H-H = 33%; L-L = 33%). This finding with an urban population contrasts with the results of Cervenka (1968), who found only two cases of father absence in his work with 43 rural, Mexican-American families of Southcentral Texas. Additionally, results indicate significant differences in rate of remarriage (H-H > L-L). Inspection revealed that 40% of the H-H group consisted of remarriage with father present, suggesting that these families had achieved marital stability only after a second marriage. Only four H-H families represented intact first marriages.

A significant difference also appeared with regard to maternal education (H-H > L-L). No such differences occurred between H-H and L-L fathers. This finding takes on significance, in light of sociological observations (Marden, 1952), reporting that Mexican-American mothers exercise a higher degree of influence on childrens' activities than Mexican-American fathers.

Finally, H-H and L-L families differed with regard to their primary source of support, with L-L families reporting Welfare (50%) more frequently than H-H families (7%). In light of other results (e.g., lack of difference in father absence, housing, paternal education, etc.), perhaps this indicates that L-L families are less able to cope with the economic demands of the urban setting.

Language data suggest a trend toward communication in Spanish by L-L families. This finding may partially account for the poor English language showing by L-L children; however, all children in the L-L group tended to score below the median in both English and Spanish, suggesting a general language deficiency.

Child-Rearing Data for H-H and L-L Families

No between-group differences appeared with regard to any of the child-rearing attitudes tapped by the Parent-Attitude Rating Survey.

Semantic Differential Data for H-H Versus L-L Families: Mothers and Fathers Combined

Semantic Differential data were collected using a +3-0-3, seven-step format and analyzed by the Median Test. Combined parental data consisted of 19 (12 mothers and 7 fathers) protocols for each group. Since the investigation of family variables was exploratory in nature, results are presented as two-tail, nondirectional analyses.

Combined parental data for the H-H and L-L families failed to differ with regard to concepts related to family roles. However, the Evaluative factor for "My Child in Head Start" did show a trend ($x^2 = .08$), with H-H parents evaluating their children more positively than L-L families. This finding offers some confirmation of teacher judgment and suggests that perhaps the childrens' mode of adjustment predated their entry into Head Start.

Table 3 gives results for the Evaluative, Activity, and Potency factors for the concepts "Learning on the Job" and "Learning in School." Results indicate that H-H and L-L parents differed significantly on the Potency factor (x^2 = .002), and a trend (x^2 = .08) appeared for the Activity factor. In both cases, H-H parents tended to view "Learning in School" as more potent and more active, suggesting a higher, perhaps more important status for School Learning in the meaning system of H-H parents.

Two-way Median Test results, using Osgood's D (which measures semantic distance between ratings of objects, persons, or concepts) to measure semantic distance between "Learning in School" versus "Learning on the Job," failed to reveal significant between-group differences. However, trends did occur for both the total D (x^2 = .08) and a D score based on the Potency factor alone (x^2 = .06). This finding suggests that H-H parents tend to discriminate more between "Learning in School" versus "Learning on the Job" than do L-L parents. Perhaps the L-L parents' failure to differentiate between these two concepts indicates a lack of real conviction regarding the value of formal education in comparison to vocational learning.

Table 4 presents data for the Evaluative, Activity, and Potency factors for the concepts "How the Anglo Teacher Sees the Mexican-American Child" and "How the Mexican-American Teacher Sees the Mexican-American Child." Two-way Median Tests for each factor on the "Anglo Teacher" profile revealed a significant between-group

TABLE 3

Median Tests for Combined Parental Semantic Differential Data for

"Learning in School" and "Learning on the Job"

	In School					On the Job				
Factor	H-H Above Med	H-H Below Med	L-L Above Med	L-L Below Med	x^2*	H-H Above Med	H-H Below Med	L-L Above Med	L-L Below Med	x^2*
E	11	6	7	10	.17	8	9	8	9	NS
A	12	5	7	10	.08	7	10	8	9	NS
P	13	4	4	13	.002	8	9	6	11	NS

x^2* is two-tail analysis

TABLE 4

Median Tests for Combined Parental Semantic Differential Data for

"How the Anglo Teacher Sees the Mexican-American Child" and

"How the Mexican-American Teacher Sees the Mexican-American Child"

	Anglo Teacher					Mexican-American Teacher				
Factor	H-H Above Med	H-H Below Med	L-L Above Med	L-L Below Med	x^2*	H-H Above Med	H-H Below Med	L-L Above Med	L-L Below Med	x^2*
E	10	7	5	12	.08	9	8	8	9	NS
A	11	6	3	14	.006	9	8	11	6	NS
P	11	6	8	9	.30	8	9	7	10	NS

x^2* is two-tail analysis

difference on the Potency factor (x^2 = .005) and a trend (x^2 = .08) appeared for the Evaluative factor. Directions for both indicate that H-H parents see Anglo teachers as viewing their children in a more positive light and as more potent. These results may have implications with regard to parental attitudes toward Anglo teachers, which may, in turn, be reflected in their childrens' ability to identify with and adjust to the Anglo teacher.

Two-way Median Tests, with the total D score, failed to yield significant differences between "Anglo Teacher" and "Mexican-American Teacher." However, a D score calculated for the Activity factor alone was significant (x^2 = .04). Inspection revealed that the semantic distance between "Anglo Teacher" and "Mexican-American Teacher" is greater for the H-H parents than for L-L parents, indicating between-group differences, at least along the Activity dimension.

Semantic Differential Data for H-H Versus L-L Families: Mothers Only

Analysis of Semantic Differential data was recalculated for Mothers Only (N = 12 per group), in order to differentiate maternal and paternal response patterns. Data were insufficient to permit similar analyses for Fathers Only. Again, two-tail Median Tests were used for all analyses.

Table 5 presents results for each item on the concept "Mexican-American Wives." Inspection revealed that H-H mothers view the "Wife" role as more hopeful, more unselfish, more lenient, and less aggressive, than do L-L mothers. Trends favoring H-H mothers occur with regard to

TABLE 5

Median Tests for Mothers Only

Semantic Differential Data for "Mexican-American Wives"

Factor	Item	H-H Above Med	H-H Below Med	L-L Above Med	L-L Below Med	x^{2}*
E	Superior-Inferior	6	6	4	8	NS
E	Happy-Sad	9	3	5	7	.09
E	Hopeful-Hopeless	8	4	3	9	.04
E	Unselfish-Selfish	8	4	3	9	.04
E	Important-Unimportant	8	4	6	6	NS
E	Angelic-Diabolic	5	7	5	7	NS
E	Wise-Foolish	4	8	5	7	NS
E	Sympathetic-Unsympathetic	9	3	5	7	.09
P	Hard-Soft	7	5	8	4	NS
P	Severe-Lenient	5	7	11	1	.009
P	Large-Small	3	9	4	8	NS
A	Excitable-Calm	6	6	6	6	NS
A	Motivated-Aimless	8	4	8	4	NS
A	Active-Passive	8	4	5	7	NS
A	Aggressive-Defensive	3	10	9	3	.005

x^{2}* is two-tail analysis

the items "Happy-Sad" and "Sympathetic-Unsympathetic." Additionally, for the concept "I, Myself," results indicate that H-H mothers perceive themselves as significantly more active than L-L mothers (x^2 = .01).

Data for H-H mothers present a picture of themselves as active and present a picture of the "Mexican-American Wife" as a nonaggressive, lenient, sympathetic, unselfish, and hopeful person. Since D scores between "I, Myself" and "Mexican-American Wives" are nonsignificant for both groups, perhaps one could speculate that both groups identify equally with the role concept set forth in the concept "Mexican-American Wives." If so, then it seems that mothers of H-H children identify with a generally more positive role than do mothers of L-L children.

Also, there are trends toward differences on the Evaluative (x^2 = .09) and the Potency (x^2 = .09) factors for the concept "Mexican-American Husband." Again, H-H mothers tend to see the "Husband" role as more potent and more positive. Perhaps the total H-H data pattern suggests a family constellation more conducive to adequate child adjustment.

Maternal factor and D scores on the concepts "Learning in School," "Learning on the Job," "How Anglo Teachers See Mexican-American Children," and "How Mexican-American Teachers See Mexican-American Children," follow the same pattern as the Combined Parent data. However, results were significant only for the "Learning in School" (Potency factor, x^2 = .005) and "Learning in School" versus

"Learning on the Job" (D score for Potency factor, x^2 = .005). The remaining concepts failed to reach significance, but did show trends (from .08 to .09). Thus, paternal scores, though limited in number, do contribute significantly to data patterns observed in the Combined Parental analysis.

Present data have several implications. First, they indicate that lower socioeconomic, Mexican-American families differ on a number of important variables and that these differences are associated with preschool child adjustment and linguistic ability. Results follow a consistent pattern in which H-H families show signs of more adequate family adjustment and more favorable "semantic structures" regarding school-related concepts. These data add to the scanty empirical research on Mexican-American families and may prove useful in beginning to structure programs designed to intervene in the family forces affecting the child's early school adjustment.

Secondly, results suggest that the Semantic Differential technique has some usefulness in attempting to identify family forces associated with good or poor preschool adjustment. Though our experience with the method indicates that it is difficult to use with this population, results certainly suggest that the difficulties involved in presenting this rather abstract technique can be overcome.

Thirdly, findings indicating the correlation between English language ability and teacher rating in the total sample suggest the need to look further into processes determining that association.

Finally, evidence indicating that urban Mexican-American families suffer more family breakdown than rural families suggests the need for much additional investigation.

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